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RUEHYD/AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE 1432  
RUEHBP/AMEMBASSY BAMAKO 0772  
RUEHGI/AMEMBASSY BANGUI 1267  
RUEHLC/AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE 0954  
RUEHUJA/AMEMBASSY ABUJA 1334  
RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NIAMEY 2877  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 2051  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1612  
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SUBJECT: CHAD: MINISTER DEFENDS PRESS CENSORSHIP

REF: N'DJAMENA 1379

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The continued censorship of the Chadian press is justified as long as Chad is in a state of war with rebel movements trying to destabilize the country, according to the country's Minister of Communication, responding to concerns raised by the Ambassador about the restrictions. The Minister also stated that the lack of professionalism among journalists in Chad's independent press is a threat to the country's national interests and imperils political and ethnic reconciliation. Effective December 6, the independent press announced a two-week suspension of publication to protest the extension of the state of emergency to six months. END SUMMARY.

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MINISTER STAUNCHLY DEFENDS THE PRESS CENSURE.  
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¶2. (SBU) During a meeting on December 11 with the Ambassador, Minister of Communication and Government Spokesman Moussa Doumgor defended the Government of Chad's decision to censor reporting by the independent media in Chad. Doumgor noted that the Government was facing internal threats from the Chadian rebel movement and external threats from Sudan that could potentially tear apart the Chadian state along ethnic and political lines. The current Chadian rebel movements pitted Tama against Zaghawa, Arab against Goran, and Northerner versus Southerner. During this period of internal strife and a state of war with a powerful adversary, the press needed to be responsible and not to inflame the situation.

¶3. (SBU) As a result of the current instability, Doumgor argued, the Government was justified in censoring the independent media. Given Chad's ethnic divisions, even simple comments could result in numerous deaths in certain parts of the country. Doumgor said that the press itself was not censured from reporting on the current instability in the country. The Government wanted, however, to ensure that the press reported factually on the events unfolding in eastern Chad. If there is a battle in Biltine, then the press should report that there was a battle in Biltine. The press should not sensationalize or mischaracterize the facts surrounding the battle, argued the Minister. For instance, if the press reported that President Deby provoked the conflict in Biltine, that item would be censured, as it was

not only a baseless assertion, but was contrary to the need for national unity against the forces of instability. According to the Minister, such comments would only feed the divisions that existed within the country.

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.AND DENOUNCES CRITIQUES BY THE INDEPENDENT MEDIA  
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¶4. (SBU) Doumgour continued to argue that the censorship was especially needed to check an independent press that lacked "intellectual maturity." He pointed out that as a former journalist, the Minister understood the meaning of a responsible press. The Chadian independent press, he argued, was a far cry from that. The press was free to report on the rebellion in the East and the inter-ethnic killings in southeastern Chad, but had to report the facts. Thus far, according to the Minister, it had failed to do so. He noted that the critiques against Deby and the Zaghawa community by some members of the press had the potential to create real divisions in the country. These divisions were exacerbated by the fact that the independent press, whose members were primarily from southern Chad, was attacking a head of state and ethnic group from the North.

¶5. (SBU) In addition, personal attacks and insults against senior GOC officials by the independent press did little to support the press's claim of professionalism, but did a great deal to incite tensions between the public and the government. He cited a specific instance in which an independent print journal referred to the Prime Minister as a "brute." Such falsehoods only incited anger against the country's leaders, and created further political and ethnic

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schisms. Insults against respectable officials needed to be censured.

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WHEN DOES IT END?  
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¶6. (SBU) The Ambassador told Doumgor that while he understood that the GOC's argument concerning a responsible press, he was concerned that the independent press was now unable to report accurately on important news items and that Chad risked losing its reputation as a country that had a reasonably liberal press environment. The Minister responded to the initial concern by saying that the independent press had done little to engage him or the GOC directly on how to accurately report the facts and avoid being censored. He contended, "if I was running an independent newspaper, I would be able to run a responsible newspaper that avoided being censored." The press simply needed to work with the GOC rather than criticize it.

¶7. (SBU) In response to the Ambassador's second point, Doumgor agreed that censorship was contradictory to the values of a democratic society. However, Chad, he argued, was in a state of war. In a time of war, a democratic society could not flourish. Stability was first required to ensure that democracy was maintained. The Minister pointed out that once there was stability in the country and the opponents of stability were defeated, the censorship would be lifted.

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INDEPENDENT MEDIA ANNOUNCES NEWS BLACKOUT  
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¶8. (U) On December 6 the francophone independent media (which had resumed publication November 30 after a one week suspension to protest the initial declaration of a state of emergency (reftel)) announced that it would suspend publication for two weeks in order to protest the extension of the state of emergency for six months. Arab language

print publications have also suspended publication. The independent radio stations do not have a similar black-out policy, although FM Liberte suspended broadcasting for one day on December 6 in solidarity with the print media.

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